

THE WINE-PRESS

THE WINE-PRESS

A TALE OF WAR

BY

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DEDICATION

*(To those who believe that Peace is the
corrupter of nations.)*

I.

PEACE? When have we prayed for
peace?

Over us burns a star
Bright, beautiful, red for strife!
Yours are only the drum and the fife
And the golden braid and the surface
of life.

Ours is the white-hot war.

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II.

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Ours are the weapons of men.

Time changes the face of the world.

Your swords are rust! Your flags are
furled

And ours are the unseen legions hurled
Up to the heights again.

III.

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Is there no wrong to right?

Wrong crying to God on high

Here where the weak and the helpless
die,

And the homeless hordes of the City
go by,

The ranks are rallied to-night.

DEDICATION

IV.

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?

Are ye so dazed with words?

Earth, heaven, shall pass away

Ere for your passionless peace we pray.

Are ye deaf to the trumpets that call
us to-day,

Blind to the blazing swords?

PRELUDE

PRELUDE

I.

SANDALPHON, whose white wings to
heaven up-bear

The weight of human prayer,
Stood silent in the still eternal light
Of God, one dreadful night.

His wings were clogged with blood, and
foul with mire,

His body seared with fire,
“Hast thou no word for Me?” the Master
said.

The angel sank his head.

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II.

“Word from the nations of the East
and West,”

He moaned, “that blood is best:
The patriot prayers of either half of
earth.

Hear Thou, and judge their worth.
Out of the obscene seas of slaughter,
hear

First, the first nation’s prayer:
*O God, deliver Thy people. Let Thy sword
Destroy our enemies, Lord.*

III.

Pure as the first, as passionate in trust
That their own cause is just,
Puppets as fond in those dark hands of
greed,
As fervent in their creed,

PRELUDE

As blindly moved, as utterly betrayed,
As urgent for thine aid,
Out of the obscene seas of slaughter,
hear

The second nation's prayer :

*O God, deliver Thy people. Let Thy
sword*

Destroy our enemies, Lord.

IV.

Over their slaughtered children, one
great cry

From either enemy ;

From either host, thigh-deep in filth
and shame,

One prayer, one and the same ;

With Thee, with Thee, Lord God of
Sabaoth,

It rests to answer both.

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Out of the obscene seas of slaughter,
hear,

From East and West one prayer:

*O God, deliver Thy people. Let Thy
sword*

Destroy our enemies, Lord."

v.

Then, on the cross of His creative pain,
God bowed His head again.

Then East and West, over all seas and
lands,

• Out-stretched His piercé^éd hands.

Then, down in hell, they chuckled,
"West and East,

Each holds one hand, at least. . . ."

"And yet," Sandalphon whispered, "men
deny

The eternal Calvary."

I.

A MURDERED man, ten miles away,
Will hardly shake your peace,
Like one red stain upon your hand;
And a tortured child in a distant land
Will never check one smile to-day,
Or bid one fiddle cease.

Not for a little news from hell
Shall London strive or cry.
Tho' thought would shatter like dynamite
These granite hills that bury the right,

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We must not think. We must not tell
The truth for which men die.

To watch the mouth of a harlot foam
For the blood of Baptist John
Is a fine thing while the fiddles play;
For blood and lust are the mode to-day,
And lust and blood were the mode of
Rome,
And we go where Rome has gone.

The plaudits round the circus roll!
On the old track we swing.
"Unrest," we say, "is in the air;"
And a flea is in the lap-dog's chair.
But the unrest that troubles the soul
Is a more difficult thing.

Unrest that has no lot or part
In anything but truth;

A TALE OF WAR

Unrest, unrest, whose passions draw
From founts of everlasting law,
Unrest that nerves the out-worn heart,
And calls, like God, to youth;

The truth that tickles no sweet sense,
The pillow of stone by night,
Unrest that no man's art can heal,
Unrest that girds the brain with steel,
And, over earth's indifference,
Like God, calls up the light;

The truth that all might know, but
all

With one consent, refuse;
To call on *that*, to break our pact
Of silence, were to make men *act*.
Good taste forbids that trumpet-call,
And a censor sends our news.

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It comes along a little wire
Sunk in a deep sea ;
It thins in the clubs to a little smoke
Between one joke and another joke ;
For a city in flames is less than the fire
That comforts you and me.

Play up, then, fiddles ! Play, bassoon !
The plains are soaked with red.
Ten thousand slaughtered fools, out
there,
Clutch at their wounds and taint the
air,
And . . . here is an excellent cartoon
On what the Kaiser said.

On with the dance ! In England yet
The meadow-grass is green.
Play up, play up, and play your part !
It is not that we lack the heart

A TALE OF WAR

But that fate deftly swings the net
And blood is best unseen.

God shields our eyes from too much
light,

Clothes the fine brain with clay ;
He wraps mankind in swaddling bands
Till the trumpet ring across all lands—
“The time is come to stand upright,
And flood the world with day.”

Not yet, O God, not yet the gleam
When all the world shall wake !
Grey and immense comes up the dawn
And yet the blinds are not withdrawn,
And, in the dusk, one hideous dream
Forbids the day to break !

.

Around a shining table sat
Five men in black tail-coats ;

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And, what their sin was, none could say;
For each was honest, after his way,
(Tho' there are sheep, and armament
firms,
With all ^{that} this "connotes.")

One was the friend of a merchant prince,
One was the foe of a priest,
One had a brother whose heart was set
On a gold star and an epaulette,
And—where the rotten carcass lies,
The vultures flock to feast.

.
But—each was honest after his way,
Lukewarm in faith, and old;
And blood, to them, was only a word,
And the point of a phrase their only
sword,
And the cost of war, they reckoned it
In little disks of gold.

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They were cleanly groomed. They were
not to be bought.

And their cigars were good.
But they had pulled so many strings
In the tinselled puppet-show of kings
That, when they talked of war, they
thought
Of sawdust, not of blood ;

Not of the crimson tempest
Where the shattered city falls :
They thought, behind their varnished
doors,
Of diplomats, ambassadors,
Budgets, and loans and boundary-lines,
Coercions and re-calls ;

Forces and Balances of Power ;
Shadows and dreams and dust ;

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And how to set their bond aside
And prove they lied not when they lied,
And which was weak, and which was
strong,

But—never which was just.

Yet they were honest, honest men.

Justice could take no wrong.
The blind arbitrament of steel,
The mailed hand, the armoured heel,
Could only prove that Justice reigned
And that her hands were strong.

For *they* were strong. So might is right,

And reason wins the day.
And, if at a touch on a silver bell
They plunged three nations into hell,
The blood of peasants is not red
A hundred miles away.

A TALE OF WAR

But, if one touch on a silver bell
Should loose, beyond control,
A blind immeasurable flood
Of lust and hate and tears and blood,
Unknown immeasurable powers
That swept to an unseen goal,

Beyond their guidance for one hour,
Beyond their utmost ken,
No huddled madman, crowned with
straw,
Could so transgress his own last
law . . .
So a secretary struck the bell
For these five honest men.

II.

With brown arms folded, by his hut,
Johann,

The young wood-cutter, waited. A bell
tolled,

The sunset fires along the mountain ran,

The bucket at the well dripped a thin
gold,

He saw the peaks like clouds of lilac
bloom

Above him, then the pine-woods, fold
on fold,

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Around him, slowly filled with deep blue
gloom.

Sleep, Dodi, sleep, he heard his young
wife say,
Hushing their child behind him in the
room.

Then, like a cottage casement, far
away,

A star thrilled in a pale green space
of sky ;
And then, like stars, with tiny ray on
ray,

He saw the homely village-lights reply :
And earth and sky were mingled in
one night,
And all that vast dissolving pageantry

A TALE OF WAR

Drew to those quintessential points of
light,

Still as the windless candles in a
shrine,

Significant in the depth as in the
height.

*O, little blue pigeon, sleep. Sleep, Dodi,
mine,*

*She murmured, Sleep, little rose in
your rosy bed.*

*The moon is rocking, rocking to rest in
the pine.*

Sleep, little blue pigeon,

Sleep on my breast,

Sleep, while the stars shine,

Sleep, while the big pine

Rocks with the white moon,

Over your nest.

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A great grey cloud sailed slowly overhead.

She stood behind Johann. Around
his eyes
Her soft hands closed. "Dodi's asleep,"
she said.

He drew her hands away. Then, as the
skies

Darkened, he muttered, "Sonia, you
must know.

I've kept the news from you all day."
Surprise

Parted her lips.

"To-morrow I must go."——
"Go? Where?"——Clear as a silver
bell, one star
Thrilled thro' the clouds. Her face
looked white as snow.

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——“To-morrow morning, Sonia. No,
not far!

To join the regiment. We are called,
you see.”——

“But why? What does it mean?”——

“Mean, Sonia? War!”

III.

III.

THE troop-train couplings clanged like
Fate

Above the bugles' din.

Sweating beneath their haversacks,
With rifles bristling on their backs,
Like heavy-footed oxen

The dusty men trooped in.

It seemed that some gigantic hand

Behind the veils of sky

Was driving, herding all these men
Like cattle into a cattle-pen,

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So few of them could understand,
So many of them must die.

Johann was crammed into his truck.
Far off, he heard a shout.
The corporal cracked a bottle of wine,
And passed the drink along the line.
The iron couplings clanged again,
And the troop-train rumbled out.

"I left my wife a month's pay,"
A voice droned at his side.
"This war, they say, will last a year.
God knows what will become of her,
With three to feed."—"Ah, that's the
way
In war," Johann replied.

"They say that war's a noble thing!
They say it's good to die,

A TALE OF WAR

For causes none can understand!
They say it's for the Fatherland!
They say it's for the Flag, the King,
And none must question why!"

The train shrieked into a tunnel.

"Duty?—Yes, that is good.

But when the thing has grown so vast
That no man knows, from first to last,
The reason why he finds himself
Up to his neck in blood;

When you are trapped and carried along
By a Power that runs on rails;
Why, open that door, my friends, and
see

The way you are fixed. You think you
are free,

But the iron wheels are singing a song
That stuns our fairy-tales;

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When you are lifted up like this
Between a finger and thumb,
And dropt you don't know where or
why,
And told to shoot and butcher and die,
And not to question, not to reply,
But go like a sheep to the shearers,
A lamb to the slaughter, dumb;

What? Are the engines, then, our
God?

Does one amongst you know
The *reason* of this bitter work?"—
"Reason? The devilry of the Turk!
Lock, stock, and barrel, the Sick Man
And all his tribe must go."

"England, they say, is on our side,"
Another voice began.

A TALE OF WAR

"The paper says it."—"But, I thought . . .
Does no one know why England fought
The great Crimean war, my friends,
Where blood so freely ran?"—

"O, ay! They say that England backed
The wrong horse, a sheer blunder!
She poured out blood *to guarantee,*
For all time, the integrity
Of European Islam."—"Ah!"—
The train rolled on like thunder.

Michael, the poet, a half Greek,
Listened to what they said.
Twice his lips parted as to speak,
And twice he sank his head,
Then a great fire burned in his eyes,
His sallow cheek flushed red.

"Comrades, comrades, you know not
The banners that you bear!

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There is a sword upon our side,
A sword that is a song," he cried;
Then, through the song, as he whispered it,
His heart poured like a prayer:

I.

Whose face, whose on high,
Lifts thro' the sky
That aureole?
Who, over earth and sea,
Cries *Victory*?
Europe, thy soul
Comes home to thee.

II.

Is it a dream, a cloud
That thus hath rent the shroud
To speak, sublime and proud,
Thy faith aloud;

A TALE OF WAR

Whose eyes make young and fair
All things in earth and air;
The shadow of whose white wing
Makes violets spring?

III.

Is it the angel of day,
Whom the blind pray
Still that their faith
Soundly sleep by night?
Blood-red, yet white,
Re-risen, she saith
Let there be Light!

IV.

Whose are the conquering eyes
That burn thro' those dark skies?
Whose is the voice that cries
Awake, arise?

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For, if she speak one word
To sheathe or draw the sword,
Her nations, on that day,
Answer her, *Yea!*

v.

It is the angel of God,
Sun-crowned, fire-shod,
Bidding hate cease.
Her proud voice on high
Bids darkness die.
Her name is Greece,
Or Liberty.

*“Comrades,” he cried, “you know not
The splendour of your blades!
This war is not as other wars:
The night shrinks with all her stars,
And Freedom rides before you
On the last of the Crusades.*

A TALE OF WAR

*She rides a snow-white charger
Tho' her flanks drip with red,
Before her blade's white levin
The Crescent pales in heaven,
Nor shall she shrink from battle
Till the sun reign overhead;*

*Till the dead Cross break in blossom,
Till the God we sacrificed,
With that same love He gave us
Stretch out His arms to save us,
Yea, till God save the People,
And heal the wounds of Christ."*

IV.

IV.

THEY crept across the valley

Where the wheat was turning brown.
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy,
When the sharp command rang over
them,

Cover, and lie down!

Johann, with four beside him,

In a cottage garden lay.
Peering over a little wall,
They heard a bird in the eaves call:
And, through the door, a clock ticked
A thousand miles away.

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A thousand miles, a thousand years,
And all so still and fair,
Then, like some huge invisible train,
Splitting the blue heavens in twain,
Out of the quiet distance rushed
A thunder of shrieking air.

The earth shook below them,
And lightnings lashed the sky,
The trees danced in the fires of hell,
The walls burst like a bursting shell;
And a bloody mouth gnawed at the
stones
Like a rat, with a thin cry.

Then, all across the valley,
Deep silence reigned anew:
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy,

A TALE OF WAR

But the red, wet shape beside Johann,
And that lay silent, too.

A bugle like a scourge of brass
Whipped thro' nerve and brain;
Up from their iron-furrowed beds
The long lines with bowed heads
Plunged to meet the hidden Death
Across the naked plain.

They leapt across the lewd flesh
That twisted at their feet;
They leapt across wild shapes that lay
Stark, besmeared with blood and clay
Like the great dead birds, with the
glazed eyes,
That the farmer hangs in the wheat.

Johann plunged onward, counting them,
Scarecrows that once were men.

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He counted them by twos, by fours,
Then, all at once, by tens, by scores!
Cover! Thro' flesh and nerve and bone
The bugles rang again.

They lay upon the naked earth,
Each in his place.
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy.
A brown bee murmured near Johann,
And the sweat streamed down his
face;

The quiet hills that they must storm
Slept softly overhead,
When, in among their sun-lit trees
A sound as of gigantic bees
Whirred, and all the plains were ripped
With leaping streaks of lead.

A TALE OF WAR

The lightnings leapt among the lines
Like a mountain-stream in flood.
Scattering the red clay they ran
A river of fire around Johann,
And, thrice, a spatter of human flesh
Blinded him with blood.

Then all the hills grew quiet
And the sun slept on the field,
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy;
But, over them, like a scourge of brass
The scornful bugles pealed.

Forward! At the double,
Not questioning what it means!
The long rows of young men
Carried their quivering flesh again
Over those wide inhuman zones
Against the cold machines.

THE WINE-PRESS

Flesh against things fleshless;
Never the soul's desire,
Never the flash of steel on steel,
But the brain that is mangled under
the wheel,
The nerves that shrivel, the limbs that
reel
Against a sheet of fire.

They reeled against the thunder,
Their captain at their head:
They reeled, they clutched at the air,
they fell!
Halt! Rapid fire! The bugles' yell
Rang along the swaying ranks,
And they crouched behind their dead.

The levelled rifles cracked like whips
Against the dark hill brow:
And, for a peasant as for a king,

A TALE OF WAR

A dead man makes good covering ;
Or, if the man be breathing yet,
There is none to save him now.

Across a heap of flesh, Johann
Fired at the unseen mark.
He had not fired a dozen rounds
When the shuddering lump of tattered
wounds
Lifted up a mangled head
And whined, like a child, in the dark.

Its eyes were out. The raw strings
Along its face lay red ;
It caught the barrel in its hands
And set it to its head.

Its jaw dropped dumbly, but Johann
Saw and understood :
The rifle flashed, and the dead man
Lay quiet in his blood.

THE WINE-PRESS

Then all along the reeking hills
And up the dark ravines,
The long rows of young men
Leapt in the glory of life again
To carry their warm and breathing
breasts
Against the cold machines;

Against the Death that mowed them
down
With a cold indifferent hand;
And every gap at once was fed
With more life from the fountain-head,
Filled up from endless ranks behind
In the name of the Fatherland,

Mown down! Mown down! Mown
down! Mown down!

They staggered in sheets of fire,
They reeled like ships in a sudden blast,

A TALE OF WAR

And shreds of flesh went spattering
past,
And the hoarse bugles laughed on
high,
Like fiends from hell—*Retire!*

The tall young men, the tall young
men,
That were so fain to die,
It was not theirs to question,
It was not theirs to reply.

They had broken their hearts on the
cold machines;
And—they had not seen their foe;
And the reason of this butcher's work
It was not theirs to know;
For these tall young men were children
Five short years ago.

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Headlong, headlong, down the hill,
They leapt across their dead.
Like madmen, wrapt in sheets of flame,
Yelling out of their hell they came,
And, in among their plunging hordes,
The shrapnel burst and spread.

The shrapnel severed the leaping limbs
And shrieked above their flight.
They rolled and plunged and writhed
like snakes
In the red hill-brooks and the black-
thorn brakes.
Their mangled bodies tumbled like elves
In a wild Walpurgis night.

Slaughter! Slaughter! Slaughter!

The cold machines whirred on.
And strange things crawled amongst
the wheat

A TALE OF WAR

With entrails dragging round their feet,
And over the foul red shambles
A fearful sunlight shone.

And a remnant reached the trenches
Where the black-mouthed guns lay still.
There was no cloud in the blue sky,
No sight, no sound of an enemy.
The sunlight slept on the valley,
And the dead slept on the hill.

.
But now, beyond the hill, there rose
A dull and sullen roar,
A sound as of distant breakers
That burst on a granite shore.

Nearer it boomed and nearer,
A muffled doomsday din,
A thunder as of assaulting seas
When the tides are rolling in.

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A corporal leapt along the trench
And shook his blade;
"God sends the Greeks up from the
South
In good time to our aid!

The Turkish dogs are in the trap
Between us! God is good!
They are driving them over the ridge
of the hill .
For our guns, our guns to work their
will.
Children of Marko, you shall lap
Your bellyful of blood."

Down, the dark clouds of Islam poured
Over the ragged height:
Down, into the valley of wheat,
And the warm dead that lay at their
feet,

A TALE OF WAR

The men they had slaughtered, slaugh-
tered, slaughtered,
Grinned up at their flight.

Behind, the conquering thunders rolled
Along the abandoned hill.

Onward the scattering squadrons came
Like madmen, wrapt in a sheet of
flame,

Straight for the lurking trenches,
Where the black-mouthed guns lay
still.

And through the masked artillery ran
A whimper of straining hounds.

"Not yet," the order passed, "lie still,
Lie still, and lick your wounds."

Johann lay quivering, in a line
That whined like a leashed wolf-pack,

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Leashed by a whisper, sharp as a sword,
At the white of their eyes, I give the
word,

Then let the moon be turned to blood,
And the sun grow black.

Up, up, like plunging bullocks

The dark-faced Moslems came.

Johann could see their wild eyes shine,

An order hissed along the line,

The black earth yawned like a crimson
mouth,

And *slaughter, slaughter, slaughter,*
slaughter,

The trenches belched their flame.

The maxims cracked like cattle-whips

Above the struggling hordes.

They rolled and plunged and writhed
like snakes

A TALE OF WAR

In the trampled wheat and the black-
thorn brakes,
And the lightnings leapt among them
Like clashing crimson swords.

The rifles flogged their wallowing herds,
Flogged them down to die.
Down on their slain the slayers lay,
And the shrapnel thrashed them into
the clay,
And tossed their limbs like tattered birds
Thro' a red volcanic sky.

Then, hard behind the thunder, swept
Long ranks of arrowy gleams;
Out of the trenches, down the hill
The level bayonets charged to kill,
And the massed terror that took the
shock
Screamed as a woman screams.

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Before Johann a young face rose
Like a remembered prayer:
He could not halt or swerve aside
In the onrush of that murderous tide,
He jerked his bayonet out of the body
And swung his butt in the air.

He yelled like a wolf to drown the cry
Of his own soul in pain.
To stifle the God in his own breast,
He yelled and cursed and struck with
the rest,
And the blood bubbled over his boots
And greased his hands again.

Faces like drowned things underfoot
Slipped as he swung round:
A red mouth crackled beneath his boot
Like thorns in spongy ground.

A TALE OF WAR

Slaughter ? Slaughter ? So easy it
seemed

This work that he thought so hard !
His eyes lit with a flicker of hell,
He licked his lips, and it tasted well ;
And—once—he had sickened to watch
them slaughter
An ox in the cattle-yard.

For lust of blood, for lust of blood,
His greasy bludgeon swung :
His rifle-butt sang in the air,
And the things that crashed beneath
it there
Were a cluster of grapes in the wine-
press,
A savour of wine on his tongue.

Till now the allies' bloody hands
Across the work could join ;

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And, as Johann stretched out his own,
A man that was cleft to the white
breast-bone

Writhed up between his knees and fired
A bullet into his groin.

He clutched at the wound. He groaned.
He fell

On the warm breasts of the slain.
Yet, as he swooned, he dreamed he
heard

From the lips of Greece one thunder-
word,

Freedom!—dreamed that the sons of
the mountain

Doubled the shout again;

Dreamed—for surely this was a dream—
He saw them, red from the fight,

A TALE OF WAR

Embraced and sobbing, "God is good,
And the blood that seals our brother-
hood

Is the red of the dawn that breaks
upon Europe."

Over him swept the night.

v.

V.

MICHAEL had brought a message home.

He came,

Groping, with blind pits where his
eyes had been,

And a face glorious with an inner
flame,

Whiter than death, and proud with
things unseen.

He came to Sonia; and she stood
there, wan,

Watching him, wondering what such
pride might mean.

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A long low flame along the mountains
ran.

He spoke to the air beyond her.

“Sonia,” he said,
“It was your birthday when I left
Johann

*In the field-hospital. Since you were wed,
The first, perhaps, without some fond
word spoken,
Some gift. And so he sent this disk of
lead*

*Which came out of his wound. Wear it
in token
That lovers cannot meet, nor freemen
rest,
Until the chains of tyranny be broken.*

A TALE OF WAR

Tell her," he said—blood washed the
golden west—

"My wound is healing fast." With
fumbling hand
Michael drew out the bullet from his
breast.

She took and kissed it.

"Ah, but this war is grand!"
The blind man murmured. "Blessed
are they that see
The beautiful angel of our Father-
land,

The glory of the angel of Liberty
Walking thro' all those teeming tents
of pain,
The tattered hospitals of our agony,

THE WINE-PRESS

Where broken men gaze into her eyes
again,

Like happy children. Sonia, I am
told

That wounds broke open for joy, tears
flowed like rain

When word came that the Allies would
soon hold

Byzantium, and the mosque that in
old days

Belonged to Christ.

There, glimmering like pale gold,

High on the walls, they say, thro' a
worn haze

Of whitewash, His crowned Face till
time shall cease

Looks down in pity on all our tangled
ways,

A TALE OF WAR

And yearns to guide us into the way
of peace.

Would God I might be with them,
when they ride,
Those hosts of Christ, the Balkan States
and Greece,

Along the Golden Horn!"

The sunset died.

Yet his blind face grew glorious with
light,
And, like a soul in ecstasy, he
cried:

The Prophet is fallen! His kingdom is
rent asunder!
The blood-stained steeds move on with
a sound of thunder!

THE WINE-PRESS

The sword of the Prophet is broken.
His cannon are dumb.
The last Crusade rides into Byzan-
tium !

See — on the walls that enshrined the
high faith of our fathers—
Rich as the dawn thro' the mist that
on Bosphorus gathers,
Gleam the mosaics, the rich encrusta-
tions of old,
Crimson on emerald, azure and opal
on gold.

Faint thro' that mist, lo, the Light of
the World, the forsaken
Glory of Christ, while with terror the
mountains are shaken,

A TALE OF WAR

Silently waits; and the skies with
wild trumpets are torn;
Waits, and the rivers run red to the
Golden Horn;

Waits, like the splendour of Truth on
the walls of Creation;
Waits, with the Beauty, the Passion,
the high Consecration,
Hidden away on the walls of the
world, in a cloud,
Till the Veil be rent, and the Judgment
proclaim Him aloud.

Ah, the deep eyes, San Sofia, that
deepen and glisten;
Ah, the crowned Face o'er thine altars,
the King that must listen,

THE WINE-PRESS

Listen and wait thro' the ages, listen
and wait,
For the tramp of a terrible host, and
a shout in the gate!

Conquerors, what is your sign, as ye
ride thro' the City?
Is it the sword of wrath, or the sheath
of pity?
Nay, but a Sword Reversed, let your
hilts on high
Lift the sign of your Captain against
the sky!

Reverse the Sword! The Crescent is
rent asunder!
Lift up the Hilt! Ride on with a sound
of thunder!

A TALE OF WAR

Lift up the Cross! The cannon, the
cannon are dumb.

The last Crusade rides into Byzan-
tium!

Under the apple-tree a shadow stirred.

An old grey peasant stood there in
the night.

"*Michael*," he said, "*this is bad news
we've heard!*"

"*Bad news?*"—"O, ay, *we're in a pretty
plight!*

They've quarrelled!"—"Who?"—"Your
great Crusading band,
Greece, and the Balkan States. *They're
going to fight!*"

THE WINE-PRESS

—“*Fight? Fight? For what?*”—“*Why,
don't you understand
What war is? For a port to export
prunes,
For Christ, my boy, and for the Father-
land!*”

VI.

VI.

JOHANN had left the tents of death
And the moan of shattered men.
By God's own grace he was fit to face
The cold machines again.

It was not his to understand,
It was only his to know
His hand was against the comrade's hand
He clasped, a month ago.

It was not his to question,
It was not his to reply ;

THE WINE-PRESS

But, over him, the night grew black;
And his own troop was falling back,
Falling back before the flag
He had helped to raise on high.

And the guns, the guns that drove
them,
Had thundered with his own!
The men he must kill for a little pay
Had marched beside him, yesterday!
Brothers in blood! By what foul lips
Was this war-trumpet blown?

Back from the heights they had stormed
together,
The gulfs that had gorged their dead,
Back, by the rotting, shot-ripped plain,
Where the black wings fluttered and
perched again,

A TALE OF WAR

And the yellow beaks in the darkness
Ripped and dripped and fed.

And once they stayed for water
By a deep marble well,
Under the walls of a shattered town
They dropt a guttering pine-torch down,
And caught one glimpse of a wine-
press
Choked with the fruits of hell;

One glimpse of the women and children,
A tangle of red and white!
The naked fruitage hissed in the glare:
They caught the smell of the singeing
hair,
And the torch was out, and the wine-
press
Black as the covering night.

THE WINE-PRESS

And fear went with them down the
roads

Where they had marched in pride ;
And villages in panic rout
Poured their rumbling ox-carts out,
And women dropped beneath their loads
And sobbed by the way-side.

VII.

VII.

ONCE, as with bleeding feet they
shambled along,

They came on a way-side fire, a ring
of light,

Where old men, women and children,
a motley throng,

And their white oxen, heavy with day-
long flight,

Crouched and couched together, on
the cold ground,

In a wild blaze of beauty that gashed
the night,

THE WINE-PRESS

Gashed and tattered the gloom like a
blood-red wound.

Now on a blue or an orange sheep-
skin cloak

It splashed, and now on the waggons
that shadowed them round.

But the great black eyes of the oxen,
forgetting the yoke,

Shone with a sheltering pity, so meek,
so mild,

While the women lay resting against
them; and the smoke

Rolled with the cloud; and Johann,
with a heart running wild,

Saw one pale woman that sat in the
midst of them,

A TALE OF WAR

With a dark-blue robe wrapped round
her, suckling a child.

And he thought of the child and the
oxen of Bethlehem.

VIII.

VIII.

BACK, they fell back before the guns,
Till on one last dark night
They lay along a mountain-ridge
Entrenched for their last fight.
A pine-wood rolled below them,
And the moon was all their light.

Johann looked down, in a wild dream,
On that remembered place:
O, like a ghost, he saw once more
The path that led to his own door,
A white thread, winding thro' the pines,
And the tears ran down his face.

THE WINE-PRESS

A ghost on guard among the dead
With a heart running wild,
For the light of a little window-pane
And all the sorrow of earth again,
A crust of bread, a head on his breast,
And the cry of his own child;

The cup of cold water
That Love would change to wine . . .
Sonia! Dodi! O, to creep back! . . .
There was a cry in the woods, the crack
Of a pistol, and a startled shout,
Halt! Give the counter-sign!

Then all the black unguarded woods
Behind them spat red flame.
A thousand rifles shattered the night;
And, after the lightning, up the height,
A thousand steady shafts of light,
The moonlit bayonets came.

A TALE OF WAR

Hurled to the trench by the storm of
steel

Under a heap of the slain,
Like one quick nerve in that welter of
death,

Johann quivered, blood choked his
breath,

And the charge broke over him like a
sea,

And passed like a hurricane.

He crept out in the ghastly moon

By a black tarpaulined gun.

He stood alone on the moaning height
While the bayonets flashed behind the
flight,

Sonia! Dodi! . . . He turned. He
broke

For the path, with a stumbling run.

THE WINE-PRESS

Down by the little white moon-lit
thread,

He rushed thro' the ghostly wood,
A living man in a world of the dead,
To the place where his own home
stood.

For War had "trained" him, strength-
ened his heart

To bear that glory agen:
And he was fitted to play his part
At last, in a "world of men."

The embers of his hut still burned;
And, in the deep blue gloom,
His bursting eyeballs yet could see
A white shape under the apple-tree,
A naked body, dabbled with red,
Like a drift of apple-bloom.

A TALE OF WAR

She lay like a broken sacrament
That the dogs have defiled,
Sonia! Sonia! Speak to me!
He babbled like a child.

The child, the child that lay on her
knees. . . .

Devil nor man may name
The things that Europe must not print,
But only whisper and chuckle and hint,
Lest the soul of Europe rise in thunder
And swords melt in the flame.

She bore the stigmata of sins
That devil nor man may tell;
For O, good taste, good taste, good taste,
Constrains and serves us well;
And the censored truth that dies on
earth
Is the crown of the lords of hell.

THE WINE-PRESS

The quiet moon sailed slowly out
From a grey cloud overhead,
When, out of the gnarled old apple-tree
There came a moan and, heavily
A patter of blood fell, gout by gout
On the white breast of the dead.

There came a moan from the apple-tree,
And the moon showed him there,—
The blind man with his arms stretched
wide,
And a nail thro' his hand on either
side,
A nail thro' the naked palms of his
feet
And a crown of thorns in his hair.

Johann knelt down before him,
“ *O brother, O Son of Man,*

A TALE OF WAR

*It was not ours to doubt or reply
When the People were led out to die,
This, this is the end of our Liberty,
And the goal for which we run."*

*O, Christ of the little children. . . .
Over his naked blade
Johann bowed, bowed and fell,
Gasping Sonia, Dodi, tell
Your God in heaven I grow so weary
Of all that He has made.*

Then, still as frost across the world
The tender moonlight spread,
And, one by one, from the apple-tree
The drops of blood fell heavily,
And the blind man that was crucified
Spake softly, to the dead.

THE WINE-PRESS

*“Conquered, we shall conquer !
They have not hurt the soul.
For there is another Captain
Whose legions round us roll,
Battling across the wastes of Death
Till all be healed and whole.*

*Till, members of one Body,
Our agony shall cease ;
Till, like a song thro’ chaos,
His marching worlds increase ;
Till the souls that sit in darkness
Behold the Prince of Peace ;*

*Till the dead Cross break in blossom ;
Till the God we sacrificed,
With that same love He gave us,
Stretch out His arms to save us,
Yea, till God save the People,
And heal the wounds of Christ.”*

EPILOGUE
THE DAWN OF PEACE

EPILOGUE

THE DAWN OF PEACE

YES—"on our brows we feel the breath
Of dawn," though in the night we
wait!

An arrow is in the heart of Death,
A God is at the doors of Fate!
The Spirit that moved upon the Deep
Is moving through the minds of
men:

The nations feel it in their sleep.
A change has touched their dreams
again.

THE WINE-PRESS

Voices, confused and faint, arise,
 Troubling their hearts from East and
 West.

A doubtful light is in their skies,
 A gleam that will not let them
 rest:

The dawn, the dawn is on the wing,
 The stir of change on every side,
Unsignalled as the approach of Spring,
 Invincible as the hawthorn-tide.

Have ye not heard, tho' darkness reigns,
 A People's voice across the gloom,
A distant thunder of rending chains,
 And nations rising from their tomb?
Then—if ye will—uplift your word
 Of cynic wisdom, till night fail,
Tell us He came to bring a sword,
 Spit poison in the Holy Grail.

A TALE OF WAR

Say that we dream! Our dreams have
woven

Truths that out-face the burning sun:
The lightnings, that we dreamed, have
cloven

Time, space, and linked all lands in
one!

Dreams! But their swift celestial fingers
Have knit the world with threads of
steel,

Till no remotest island lingers
Outside the world's great Common-
weal.

Tell us that custom, sloth, and fear
Are strong, then name them "common-
sense"!

Tell us that greed rules everywhere,
Then dub the lie "experience":

THE WINE-PRESS

Year after year, age after age,
Has handed down, thro' fool and
child,
For earth's divinest heritage
The dreams whereon old wisdom
smiled.

Dreams are they? But ye cannot stay
them,
Or thrust the dawn back for one hour!
Truth, Love, and Justice, if ye slay them,
Return with more than earthly
power:
Strive, if ye will, to seal the fountains
That send the Spring thro' leaf and
spray:
Drive back the sun from the Eastern
mountains,
Then—bid this mightier movement
stay.

A TALE OF WAR

It is the Dawn! the Dawn! The
nations

From East to West have heard a
cry,—

“Though all earth’s blood-red genera-
tions

By hate and slaughter climbed thus
high,

Here—on this height—still to aspire,

One only path remains untrod,

One path of love and peace climbs
higher.

Make straight that highway for our
God.”

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